



Society for Research in Child Development

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Parenting Program for Low-Income Families Reduces Toddlers' Problem Behavior

Low-income families who participated in a brief, tailored intervention program designed to improve parenting saw less problem behavior in their toddlers than did families who did not participate. That's the finding of a new study published in the September/October 2008 issue of the journal *Child Development*. The research was conducted at the University of Oregon, University of Pittsburgh, Case Western Reserve University, Oxford University, and the University of Virginia.

The researchers studied 731 families who took part in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Nutrition Program in three geographically and culturally diverse U.S. communities. Half the families were randomly assigned to participate in an intervention called the Family Check-Up—a brief, motivational program that identified and encouraged positive parenting practices—and half received services as usual. The Family Check-Up is adapted and tailored to fit the individual circumstances of low-income families; in addition, it is less expensive than more traditional parenting interventions. The services a parent receives are based on the results of family assessments and focus on motivating change only in those parenting practices that are problematic and prognostic of future adjustment problems in the young children.

Families were videotaped interacting with their children at ages 2 and 3, and they filled out questionnaires about their children's problem behaviors at ages 2, 3, and 4. In this way, the researchers assessed parents' use of positive behavior support practices, including proactive parenting (such as when parents anticipate problem behavior and intercede to prevent it) and positive reinforcement, and the amount of involvement and interaction time between parents and children.

Parents who were randomly assigned to the Family Check-Up intervention reported less problem behavior in their 2- to 4-year-old children; moreover, the researchers noted that they supported positive behavior in their young children more than did parents who had not taken part in the program. Families with the highest risk toddlers were found to be the most responsive to the Family Check-Up program.

“These findings replicate and extend previous research on family-centered interventions in general and the Family Check-Up in particular for improving problem

behavior from childhood through adolescence,” says Thomas J. Dishion, professor of psychology and school psychology and director of the Child and Family Center at the University of Oregon, who led the study. “They underscore the value of making empirically supported family interventions part of existing service delivery systems that involve low-income children and families as a public health strategy. By using this strategy as part of a health-maintenance model, long-term improvements in young children’s social and emotional adjustment can be achieved.”

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Summarized from Child Development, Vol. 79, Issue 5, *The Family Check-Up with High-Risk Indigent Families: Preventing Problem Behavior by Increasing Parents’ Positive Behavior Support in Early Childhood* by Dishion, TJ (University of Oregon), Shaw, D (University of Pittsburgh), Connell, A (Case Western Reserve University), Gardner, F (Oxford University), Weaver, C (University of Pittsburgh), and Wilson, M (University of Virginia). Copyright 2008 The Society for Research in Child Development, Inc. All rights reserved.